DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 435 HE 012 456

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TITLE A Guide for New Trustees.
INSTITUTION Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 15p.; May not reproduce well due to print color.
AVAILABLE FROM Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Selection; Board Administrator Relationship; Check Lists; *College Administration; College Faculty; College Presidents; College Role; College Students; Governance; *Governing Boards; Guidelines; Higher Education; *Leadership Responsibility; Policy Formation; Role Conflict; *Role Perception; School Community Relationship; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Trustees

ABSTRACT

Guidelines are given for new governing board trustees to prepare themselves for their responsibilities. Briefly outlined are the trustee's 10 major responsibilities: selection, nurture, and termination of the president; financial support and management; maintenance and expansion of the physical plant; public relations; clarification of purpose; assessment of performance; bridging the gap between community and campus; preservation of institutional independence; court of final appeal; and self-evaluation. These issues and elements of governance are briefly discussed: learning during the first year; background of higher education, and keeping up with current issues; knowing the institution; the issue of policy and administrative roles; delegating authority; faculty and student relations; and assessing one's own performance. A checklist is given for the latter. Suggested reading materials are listed. (MSE)

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A Guide For New Trustees

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

HE 012 456

Nancy R. Axelrod

Nancy R. Axelrod is Director of Special Projects at AGB. She has just completed two major projects on presidential selection and assessment, and financial responsibilities of governing boards and is presently working on a study of trustee selection procedures. Before joining AGB in 1974, she worked as a program associate in the Office of Federal Programs with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

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Printed in the United States of America
2nd printing February 1979
3rd printing September 1979

A Guide For New Trustees

This guide is intended to supplement the orientation programs which all colleges and universities should offer to new board members. It is based on recommendations offered to new trustees and regents at a series of regional workshops conducted by AGB in 1976 under its Trustee Leadership Program funded by the Lilly Endowment, as well as calls for information directed to the Clearinghouse by new trustees and regents trying to learn how to become effective board members.

The protection, preservation and enhancement of colleges and universities able to respond to mounting academic, economic, and social pressures is a responsibility entrusted to governing boards. The tradition of governance by qualified lay people unencumbered by special interests is basic to the philosophy of higher education in America. The purpose of this booklet is to help you, as a new member of a governing board, to identify and assemble the information you need in assuming this important responsibility.

Orientation programs for new trustees and regents range from a hearty welcome accompanied by a free copy of the bylaws to a two-day game-simulation training workshop. Regardless of the quality of the orientation program, most new trustees and regents tend to characterize their first year of trusteeship as exciting, demanding, perplexing, and sometimes a little

overwhelming. The following guidelines are suggested measures to consider in preparation for the challenges ahead.

It takes time . . .

A *Wall Street Journal* article described the ideal modern board member as "a man or woman with the versatility of Leonardo Da Vinci, the financial acumen of Bernard Baruch, and the scholarly bent of Erasmus." Although institutions would be hard pressed to fill board vacancies on the basis of these requirements, the board member of the 1970s must be an individual with an extraordinary commitment – a commitment to the academic, financial and social welfare of his or her institution and to the principles of American postsecondary education.

But in addition to commitment, effective trusteeship requires something else: a willingness to devote the needed time. This requirement will not be fulfilled merely by the hours spent in board or committee meetings.

What are your responsibilities as a trustee?

One of the first things you should do (if you haven't already done it!) is to read another booklet in this AGB Pocket Publications series: *The Trustee's Ten Responsibilities*, by John W. Nason. The ancient dictum of a Harvard president was that the trustees' job was to "appoint the president and see that the bills are paid." Dr. Nason's

list (not necessarily in priority order) represents a rather formidable expansion of these duties for the modern trustee:

1. Selection, nurture and termination of the president.
2. Financial support and management.
3. Maintenance and expansion of the physical plant.
4. Public relations.
5. Clarification of purpose.
6. Assessment of performance.
7. Bridging the gap between community and campus.
8. Preservation of institutional independence.
9. Court of final appeal.
10. Self-evaluation.

The booklet spells out the full sense of each responsibility.

Your first year

Some of you may be advised to confine your role largely to listening and learning during your first six to twelve months on the board. Whether you choose this course or not, you can enrich the listening and learning experience by doing your homework. If you take the initiative in studying your role, the history and mission of your institution and in becoming familiar with current education issues you'll find you can be a full participant in board deliberations quite swiftly. And frankly, most colleges and universities today can't wait for two or three years for you to become productive.

Institutional documents such as bylaws and the board policy handbook (if one exists), can give you a sense of the board's purpose and method of operation. If, however, you are dissatisfied with the written material provided, ask your chairperson and chief executive to help you prepare a list of your responsibilities; other board members may profit from this exercise as well.

The backdrop of education

To acquire an awareness of national trends in governance and postsecondary education generally, read *AGB*

News Notes, the national monthly newsletter on trusteeship. *AGB Reports*, the national journal of trusteeship, will give you basic information on the major problems and potential solutions. The Pocket Publication series provides compact information on basic issues.

A great many other publications, such as the weekly *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Change* magazine, *Educational Record* and *The Journal of Higher Education* will probably be available to you through your board staff or administration. Information on specific subjects may be obtained from the AGB Trustee Information Clearinghouse, and a number of books relevant to trustee problems are available from the AGB Lending Library.

You can broaden your outlook, too, by attending national, state and regional conferences that will provide you with opportunities to talk to trustees of other institutions. Try to attend board meetings at institutions similar to your own as well.

Know your institution

Regular attendance at board meetings, of course, is absolutely necessary, but there are other valuable opportunities for acquiring an understanding of your institution. Take advantage of invitations to campus events such as commencement exercises and especially of invitations extended to your board to meet with students and faculty.

Tour your campus facilities with a knowledgeable guide. Read the student newspaper, the institution's catalog and other publications that tell what is going on on campus.

If your board chairperson and chief executive don't volunteer their availability to answer your questions, try to make arrangements to talk with them. They are your best source of information on the basics of board operation and institutional priorities.

These two individuals and other members of the board can help you understand how the system of governance works at your institution. The

decision-making process involves other members of your campus community and established policies you should know about. How are matters brought to the board's attention, and who makes which decision? What role do staff members, the faculty senate, student government, established grievance procedures and statements of rights and responsibilities play in the governance process?

Another good source of information on institutional affairs is the board secretary or professional staff member who works with the board.

Ask your president to give you a list of the major issues the administration faces, and ask your chairperson for a list of the major issues the board faces. You can also get a feel for board operations by looking over recent committee reports and minutes from meetings.

The agenda you receive before each meeting should suggest advance reading or discussion with other members in preparation for the decisions to be made at the meeting. Some boards supplement the agenda sent to each member with a written statement about motions proposed for action and the rationale for the action. This, along with a list of alternative proposals will give you "food for thought." If you can get these at least a week before the meeting, you will have a chance to do related reading and to thoughtfully consider your questions and views.

In your search for information, you may discover deficiencies with the administration's system for providing the board with particular kinds of information. As a new board member, your inexperience may actually be advantageous—you may raise questions that some of your longer-term colleagues may have wanted to ask, but hesitated to bring up. In many ways, you can be even more effective than the trustee with longer tenure by questioning board practices that need improvement.

Above all, do not be afraid to ask questions. Why this rather than some-

thing else? How much value has that program, policy or administrative procedure? How do faculty and students feel? What does the public expect of the institution? Why does this problem arise now? And so forth.

Policy vs. administration

New trustees are often confounded by that murky area between their policy-making role and the administration's policy-implementation role.

The lines of demarcation appear fuzzy at times because sound policies cannot be made without some sort of involvement with day-to-day operation. Yet board members should try to concentrate on questions that look to the future implications of current policies and practices. Who will implement the policies and precisely how this will be done is a question which should be left to your chief administrators.

John J. Corson has defined the separation between policy and execution by advising trustees to "keep their noses in operations that they may keep their fingers out." Questioning a faculty salary that appears out of line with figures for equivalent rankings is keeping your nose in. Letting the appropriate administrators determine regular appointments, promotions, and salary raises is keeping your fingers out. Questioning the compatibility of a new academic program with your institution's long-range plan is keeping your nose in. Relying on the faculty and administration to set the curriculum for that program is keeping your fingers out.

The quality of the educational program is the most important determinant of institutional quality and cannot be isolated from other policy issues. Accept the fact that the structure and the development of the curriculum itself is a matter best left to the academicians.

However, this should not preclude you from asking questions that relate to long range educational goals or from becoming knowledgeable about admissions policies, student body com-

position, and other aspects of the academic program – all of which bear on budget priorities.

If you find yourself classifying too many agenda items for your board meetings as purely administrative or trivial, bring your concern to the attention of your board chairperson, and particularly your chief executive.

Delegating authority

Your policy-making role demands that you delegate authority at various times to your administration and faculty.

One of your most important board roles will be the selection, appointment, and evaluation of a chief executive. How, when, and to whom to delegate authority will not be a difficult task if you have confidence in your administrative team. Your accountability does not end, however, with a competent chief executive!

As a new board member, you may be reluctant to disagree with the chief executive or express reservations about a recommended policy. However, a good leader welcomes feedback from his or her board. In examining the long-term implications of institutional practices, there will always be questions which must be answered before you can be satisfied with your contribution. Raising questions is also important in protecting the board against potential legal liability claims.

Faculty and student relations

Faculty and students represent two of the most precious resources in your trust. A board which is not sensitive to their contributions, their concerns, and their perceptions places itself in a double jeopardy situation by (1) overlooking the most important reasons for its existence; and (2) causing faculty and students to perceive the board as a remote body oblivious to the reality of the institutional environment.

As a new member, your instincts may tell you that this is a missing ingredient in your board's deliberations. If so, consult with your board chair-

person and chief executive to see if a communications system can be developed to provide the board with faculty and student input, and the faculty and student body with regular reports of board activity.

You may at some point find yourself buttonholed by a professor or student and "griped to." The thing to bear in mind when this happens is that since you cannot speak for the board as a whole you must avoid seeming to. C. Peter Magrath, president of the University of Minnesota, at an AGB Regional Seminar, had this to say about private conversations between board members and faculty:

> *I believe the best approach for trustees is the straightforward one that they will listen to whatever faculty members have to say, that they are glad to hear individuals' judgments and views, and that they will keep them in mind and take account of them.*

Assessing your performance

You may find that you have no need for a formal method of self-evaluation. However, the following checklist may suggest ways in which you can enhance your role. A more extensive set of guidelines which have been developed to assess overall board performance is available from AGB.*

____ 1. I believe I understand my role and responsibilities as a board member.

____ 2. I understand the distinction between my role as a policy maker, and the role of the president and his/her staff as administrators.

____ 3. I am familiar with my institution's uniqueness, strengths and shortcomings, and can articulate its contribution to society.

Self-Study Guidelines and Criteria have been developed for governing boards of each type of college and university, as well as for state postsecondary planning and coordinating boards

4. I am conscientious in keeping pace with new development in postsecondary education by reviewing the literature periodically and/or attending national state or local meetings.

5. I am aware of the contributions and concerns of the faculty and student body.

6. When possible, I attend campus activities and events to which I am invited.

7. I prepare adequately for each board meeting.

8. I participate actively in all board meetings.

9. I am willing to listen to the other viewpoints expressed by my fellow board members.

10. I support the majority decisions of the board.

11. I exercise discretion in dealing with sensitive matters.

12. I call on my board chairperson or chief executive when I have questions about board policy or operation.

13. I support my institution's fund-raising efforts through an annual gift according to my means, and by my willingness to make solicitation visits as requested by the staff.

14. I receive the kind of information I need to monitor my institution's health and formulate sound policies.

This decade has witnessed an increase in commitment and service on the part of the nation's trustees. Serving on a college or university governing board will provide you with the satisfaction of making a contribution to society, and the opportunity to learn more about one of its most valuable institutions.

There are no arcane skills needed

to do a good job. You will also find that the resources at your disposal for learning to be effective in your role are plentiful. Once you have acquired a sense of the postsecondary educational world, your institution's mission within it, and your role as a part of the whole, the sheer enjoyment of being a fundamental part of it all comes naturally.

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